

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 0048

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SCUL, CZ
SUBJECT: STATUS OF SEVERAL PROMINENT NON-OFFICIAL ARTISTS

USIA FOR IEU

1. SIXTEEN PROMINENT ARTISTS, NONE OF WHOM ARE ALLOWED TO EXHIBIT IN PRAGUE AT PRESENT, WILL REPORTEDLY BE INVITED BY THE GOC'S ARTISTS UNION FOR DISCUSSIONS IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. THE ARTISTS WHO WERE EITHER EXPELLED FROM OR RESIGNED FROM THE UNION IN THE POST-'68 EVENTS, INCLUDE SEVERAL PERSONALITIES WITH WORLD REPUTATIONS, SUCH AS JIRI KOLAR, WHO WAS FEATURED IN A ONE-PERSON SHOW AT THE GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM IN 1975; STANISLAV KOLIBAL, WHO LIKEWISE HAD A NEW YORK SHOW THAT YEAR; OTA JANACEK, INTERNATIONALLY KNOWN AS AN ILLUSTRATOR OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS; VERA AND VLADIMIR JANOUSEK, SCULPTORS, WHOSE WORK WAS FEATURED AT THE CZECHOSLOVAK PAVILLIONS AT THE OSAKA AND MONTREAL WORLDS FAIRS; CESTMIR KAFKA, AND ABSTRACTIONIST AND FORMER UNION OFFICIAL; OLBRAM ZOUBEK AND EVA KMENTOVA, SCULPTORS; AND SEVERAL OTHERS.

2. JANOUSEK, WHO WAS SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ARTISTS' UNION IN THE LATE 60S, RECENTLY TOLD THE PAO THE ARTISTS PROBABLY WILL BE INDIVIDUALLY CALLED TO THE ARTISTS' UNION OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS AND, POSSIBLY, BE ASKED TO SIGN STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT FOR THE PARTY, OR THE GOALS OF THE RECENT PARTY

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CONGRESS, OR TO SAY THEIR VIEWS ABOUT '68 WERE MISTAKEN, ETC. EVEN IF SOME DO SIGN, WHICH HE SAID WAS BY NO MEANS CERTAIN, THERE IS LITTLE LIKELIHOOD THEY WILL BE IMMEDIATELY ACCEPTED BACK INTO THE UNION AND WITH IT GIVEN THE RIGHT TO PUBLICLY EXHIBIT AND SELL THEIR WORKS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND ABROAD. THE CZECHOSLOVAK ARTIST SAID, "IT WILL TAKE FIVE OR TEN YEARS" FOR THE "REHABILITATION" PROCESS TO TAKE PLACE, CITING THE CASE OF

BOHUMIL HRABEL, A FAMOUS CZECH WRITER, AUTHOR OF THE SCREENPLAY OF "CLOSELY WATCHED TRAINS," WHO, AFTER PUBLICLY RECANTING HIS VIEWS ABOUT THE '68 GOVERNMENT, WAS ALLOWED TO PUBLISH A SINGLE NOVEL THIS YEAR, ONE HE ACTUALLY WROTE SEVERAL YEARS AGO.

3. "SINCE 1970 A LOT OF MEDIOCRE PEOPLE HAVE MOVED INTO POSITIONS OF POWER IN THE ARTISTS' UNION, AND HAVE BECOME THE ARTISTS FEATURED IN EXHIBITIONS AND WHO GET THE LUCRATIVE COMMISSIONS FOR WORKS PURCHASED BY THE GOVERNMENT," HE SAID, ADDING, "THEY ARE NOT ABOUT TO TURN THEIR POSITIONS OVER TO A LARGE NUMBER OF COLLEAGUES WITH PROVEN INTERNATIONAL REPUTATIONS WHO COULD QUICKLY ECLIPSE THEM IN PROMINENCE."

4. JANOUCEK SAID THE THOUGHT THE WORD "DISSIDENTS" IS AN INADEQUATE TERM TO DESCRIBE CREATIVE ARTISTS NOT IN THE GOVERNMENT'S FAVOR. HE SAID HIS "CRIME" WAS BEING AN ABSTRACTIONIST RATHER THAN A SO-CALLED SOCIAL REALIST, ALTHOUGH HE HAD LONG BEEN A SUPPORTER OF ART FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC AND HAD PROPOSED A SCHEME TO BEAUTIFY AN AREA DESECRATED BY STRIP MINING WITH HUGE PIECES OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCULPTURE.

5. HE SAID THAT WRITER LUDWIG VACULIK HAD RECENTLY ENCOURAGED FELLOW "DISSIDENTS" TO FIND A NEW AND BETTER WORD TO DESCRIBE NON-OFFICIAL ARTISTS AND THE PROJECT HAS CREATED CONSIDERABLE INTEREST AMONG SAMIZDAT WRITERS. CZECHOSLOVAKS SEE A VAST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A WRITER LIKE VACULIK, WHO WAS ONCE A HIGH FUNCTIONARY IN THE WRITERS' UNION, HAVEL, WHO RESOLUTELY STAYED CONFIDENTIAL

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OUT OF POLITICS ALTOGETHER, AND PAVEL KOHOUT, WHO SOME REGARD AS A RANK OPPORTUNIST AND SELF-PROMOTER. IT IS NOT GENERALLY KNOWN THAT KOHOUT, WHO NOW BILLS HIMSELF IN THE WEST AS SPOKESMAN FOR A GENERATION OF DEPRIVED INTELLECTUALS, WAS A POETIC CHEERLEADER FOR STALIN IN THE 50S, THE SOURCE SAID.

6. COMMENT: IF THE GOC IS IN FACT PLANNING TO MAKE ANY OVERTURES TOWARD BRINGING ITS PROMINENT NON-OFFICIAL CREATIVE INTELLECTUALS BACK INTO THE FOLD, THE PROCESS PROBABLY WILL BE SLOW IN COMING AND NOT WITHOUT A PUBLIC PRICE FOR THE INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED. WHILE A FEW ARTISTS SEE SOME SIGNS OF MOVEMENT ON THE GOC'S SIDE, AT LEAST ONE OTHER ARTIST FROM THE GROUP MENTIONED ABOVE SEES THE PRESENT GROUP OF NON-OFFICIAL ARTISTS AS A "LOST GENERATION" OF CZECHOSLOVAK ART, CONDEMNED TO OFFICIAL OBLIVION, NOT FOR REASONS OF ART OR POLITICS, BUT FOR HAVING BEEN WHERE THEY WERE WHEN THE EVENTS OF '68 UNFOLDED. THERE IS, OF COURSE, AN INTERESTING PARALLEL BETWEEN THE RUMORED GOC MOVE AND RECENT MOVES IN THE USSR AIMED AT BRINGING SOME SOVIET NON-OFFICIAL ARTISTS BACK INTO THE ESTABLISHMENT FOLD.

BYRNE

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